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ABSTRACT

A review of the status of English language instruction in Kuwait begins with an overview of the role of English in the society in general, and outlines the status of English use and instruction in the educational system in secondary, higher, vocational, adult, and teacher education. Also discussed are characteristics and training of English language instructors, the type and availability of instructional materials, educational administration and planning in relation to English teaching, English instruction outside the educational system, British support, commercial opportunities related to English instruction, language research, and other sources of information. It is concluded that there is a growing need for English language instruction in Kuwait, adequate financial resources are available, a well-established infrastructure exists to support English language instruction, and the language is of great importance in business, education, science, and technology and as a lingua franca. However, the feeling that Arabic must not be usurped as the national language may be responsible for a lack of clarity in the formulation of language training needs and objectives outside the educational system. There also exists a prevailing attitude that language study is an academic exercise rather than training in a skill, and financial constraints are placed on specially designed ELT programs, with resources going for cheaper, usually inferior, language training. (MSE)

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ENGLISH TEACHING PROFILE

Country: Kuwait

Date: May 1986

1. ROLE AND STATUS OF ENGLISH

Arabic is the official language of Kuwait, but English is the main second language and important in education, commerce, science and technology. English is a compulsory subject in intermediate and secondary schools, and is officially the medium of instruction in the Science, Engineering and Medical Faculties of Kuwait University. Many promising young Kuwaitis still go abroad for higher education and, with over fifty per cent of these choosing universities in the English-speaking world, a good knowledge of English is considered essential for academic advancement, at least in the sciences.

There are two English language daily newspapers, carrying mainly agency reports. Thirty-five per cent of the total hours of television broadcast are of 'foreign' origin, the majority in English with Arabic subtitles. There is also one radio channel which broadcasts in English, but most of its output is given over to non-stop stereo music. Few people read books in English, except for academic purposes, and there are no local authors of any consequence writing in English.

English serves as a lingua franca for the non-Arab expatriates in Kuwait, who comprise about six per cent of the population and come mainly from the Indian subcontinent. It is also the language used for most business contacts between Kuwaitis and non-Arabic speakers, and is important in financial institutions with international contacts. Normal local, as well as international, banking procedures can be carried out in English or Arabic. Despite the 1982 stock market crash, and the fall in oil prices in 1985, Kuwait is still one of the richest countries in the world in terms of per capita GNP, owns a high proportion of known oil reserves, and is a significant financial centre. Good English is a prerequisite for managers in commercial

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and financial institutions, as well as in the oil industry. English is used for necessary outside contacts in public administration and some government publications, for example the Annual Statistical Abstract, are printed in both Arabic and English. Middle-level civil servants (mostly expatriate Arabs) often speak good English, many of them having studied abroad. The standard of English among senior civil servants (mostly Kuwaitis) is more variable. English is much in evidence on the streets of Kuwait City; all major road signs and shop signs are written in both Arabic and English, and the packaging on the vast quantities of imported goods is usually printed in both languages.

2. ENGLISH WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The state school system

There is no teaching of English at the pre-primary (ages 4-6) and primary (ages 7-10) levels. All pupils begin English as a compulsory subject on entering intermediate school at the age of eleven. The syllabus comes under the central control of the Ministry of Education, and all pupils follow the Oxford University Press Crescent Course Books 1-4.

Considerable importance is attached to English as a subject. Pupils study it for five periods a week in the first two years of intermediate school, and for six periods a week in the third and fourth years. Periods are forty-five minutes long in winter, forty minutes in summer. The pupils' progress is monitored by both continuous assessment and end-of-year exams. These exams are produced by class teachers or by schools.

In secondary school all pupils follow a general course for two years, during which they study English for eight periods per week in the first year, and seven per week in the second year. During their final two years they specialize in arts or sciences; those entering the arts system study English for eight periods a week in their remaining two years in secondary school, while those in the science stream have English for only seven periods a week. All pupils continue to use the Crescent Course, and no particular effort is made towards subject-specified English. English literature is not taught in Kuwaiti secondary schools.

As in the intermediate schools, progress is monitored by both continuous assessment and regular examinations. In sixteen experimental secondary schools which use the unit/credit system, 50% of a pupil's overall mark is taken from continuous assessment grades, and 50% from performance in examinations, as compared to 25% from continuous assessment and 75% by examination in the ordinary schools.

Post-secondary and vocational

English is taught in all five post-secondary technical and vocational institutes run by the Department of Technical and Vocational Education in the new Public Authority for Applied Education and Training.

Kuwait Business Institute offers courses for men and women in accountacy, secretarial skills, materials management and related subjects. One subject (computing) is officially taught in English, but in practice Arabic is often used. There are courses in English shorthand and typing. As in the university (see below) all students must take three compulsory skills courses

in English. There is also a remedial course for those who do not pass the initial English test. Teachers are using Kernel Lessons Intermediate for the remedial (non-credit) course, and Kernel Lessons Plus for the advanced credit-earning General English course as well as materials developed by the British Council.

Kuwait Institute of Applied Technology teaches all subjects in English except construction engineering. All the students (men only) follow English courses produced under the Council's ESP materials contract (1980-2).

The Health Institute offers courses for women in nursing, food science and environmental health. Although nursing is the only subject taught in English, all students follow at least one compulsory English course.

Men's and Women's Teacher Training Colleges: in both these institutes English is a compulsory subject, but since they are principally involved in training primary school teachers who do not need to teach English, the subject is not of great importance.

Kuwait University

Entrance requirements

The University Council chooses students from among Kuwaitis, Arab citizens and foreigners who have obtained their secondary school certificate or its equivalent. Entry requirements vary from faculty to faculty and, although no particular level of English is necessary, those who fail a faculty's English placement test are required to take remedial courses before commencing ESP.

The Language Centre

This was established during the academic year 1973-4. It is responsible for all foreign language courses taught in the University; most of the teaching is of English. Foreign language courses are obligatory, and comprise part of the general university requirements for graduation. All students must take three English language credit courses in addition to any remedial course they need to gain entry to the first credit course, as a result of their performance in the placement test. The remedial course may be 5-15 hours per week. This means that every student who graduates will have had a minimum of 3 x 5 x 15 = 225 hours of English in addition to any remedial or elective courses taken.

A language unit is attached to each faculty under the direction of a supervisor. Courses in the medicine, science and engineering faculties use materials specifically written for students of that faculty, concentrating on the appropriate study skills. The Medical Faculty has its own administratively separate language unit, and the students follow an intensive English programme for their first three semesters of study.

Department of English Language and Literature

This was opened at the foundation of Kuwait University in 1966, and provides courses for those majoring in English language and literature. There are currently thirty-one faculty members, seventeen language instructors and 950 enrolled students.

The emphasis in the first two years of the course of study is on language work, which takes up over 80% of the students' time. The third and fourth years concentrate on literature and linguistics. Details of the curriculum and course requirements are available from the British Council.

Private schools

Approximately 18% of the total school population is enrolled in private schools, under the supervision of the Private Schools Department of the Ministry of Education. Among these are several English-medium schools, some catering almost exclusively for British or American children, while others attract a large proportion of Arab and other children whose parents want them to be educated in an English-speaking environment. Many of the teachers in these schools are native speakers using mother-tongue rather than English as a Foreign Language (EFL) methods in their teaching.

Teacher training

Pre-service training is provided in the Men's and Women's Teacher Training Colleges for primary school teachers (see above). Secondary school teachers are trained at the College of Education at the university, but intermediate and secondary school teachers of English are, almost without exception, non-Kuwaiti nationals and have therefore been trained in their own countries, principally Egypt, Jordan and Palestine. There are great differences between teachers in both level of English proficiency and standard of teaching, although traditional methods still predominate.

The Inspectorate

There are forty-four inspectors of English, divided into four groups each under a senior inspector; they cover secondary schools, intermediate schools and private schools in Kuwait City and the Ahmadi area. The whole Inspectorate, headed by a Chief Inspector, has a wide range of responsibilities in addition to the regular inspection of English teaching. These include: in-service training, curriculum development, information and contacts outside Kuwait.

Non-formal and adult education

Apart from the private language schools (see Section 7) and the British Council's Centre of English Studies (see Section 8), the main source of ELT for those wanting to study informally is the University's Centre of Community Service and Continuing Education. This operates in the evenings, using the facilities and many of the teachers from the Language Centre. The programmes they offer are heavily subsidized, enabling them to pay high rates to attract the best teachers, while at the same time keeping fees to a minimum.

English by radio and television

There are two channels on Kuwait television. Channel 2 is predominantly English language broadcasts with Arabic subtitles, mostly American with some British productions. There are no television programmes designed for the teaching of English.

3. TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

Of the 2,500 teachers of English in schools in Kuwait, less than 10% are Kuwaitis, and these are mainly women teaching English in the intermediate

schools. In the schools, and in vocational education, most of the teachers come from other Arab countries with a few from the Indian subcontinent. At the University Language Centre there are approximately thirty British teachers (of whom fourteen are British Council-recruited), the rest (approximately one-hundred) are Americans and Arabs of various nationalities.

The Kuwait government has no difficulty in recruiting as many teachers as it needs from the poorer Arab countries, since they are easily attracted by the relatively high salaries offered. They have had all types of training, but most have a BA from an Arab university, and less than 10% are graduates from teacher training colleges. The only provision for in-service training is that provided by the Inspectorate, and since the suppression of the British Council's English Language Officer post there has been considerably less British involvement in seminars and courses for teachers.

4. TEACHING MATERIALS

All secondary and intermediate schools in Kuwait are now using the Oxford University Press Crescent course, and they are adequately supplied with materials. Schools using the experimental unit/credit system pupils follow Crescent for the compulsory courses, but ESP-type materials are being developed for some of the elective courses, most by university language centre staff working part-time in the summer vacation.

About half the eighty or so secondary schools are equipped with language laboratories, and the inspectors are currently involved in organizing courses to encourage teachers to make better use of these facilities.

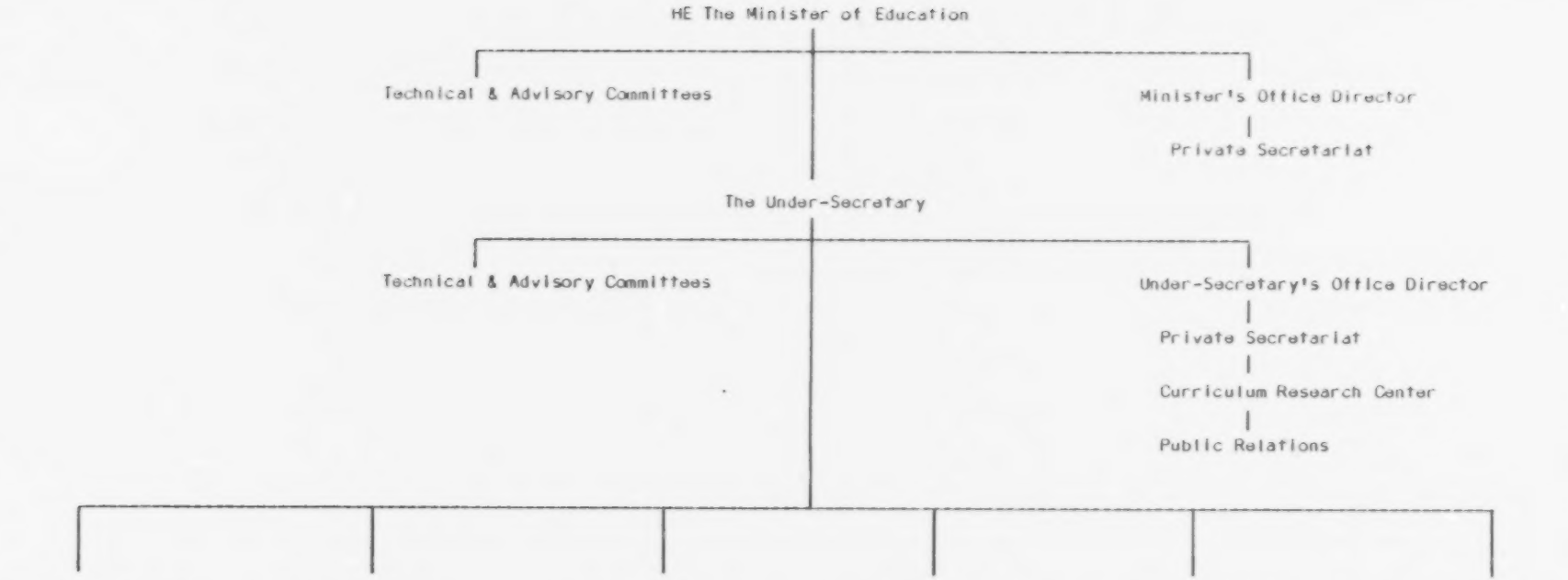
It is not proposed to install laboratories in schools which do not have them. In general, the available teaching-aids hardware is under-utilized because of the lack of appropriate software and/or appropriate training of teachers.

5. EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN RELATION TO ENGLISH TEACHING

Education in Kuwait is administered centrally by the Ministry of Education. The chart shows the structure of the Ministry.

6. DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING OF THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

For a general outline of the education system, its traditions and development, see the British Council's Education Profile. The key body in planning the teaching of English is the Inspectorate which has access, through participation in advisory and planning committees, directly to the Under-Secretary at the Ministry. Developments are monitored by the Curriculum Research Centre, whose Director reports directly to the Minister of Education and advises on curriculum matters. There are three full-time staff in the English section of the Centre.



General Records Dept
Attendance & Leave Department
Legal Affairs Dept
Admin. Organisation Department
Labours Department
Personnel Dept

Purchasing & Tenders Department
Catering Department
Housing & Transportation Department
General Services
General Stores Dept
Finance Affairs

Adult & Illiteracy Eradication Department
Private Education Dept
Technical & Vocational Education Department

Science Museum
Examinations & Student Affairs Department
Social Services Department
PE Department

General Inspectorate
Special Education Dept
Religious Institute
KG Departments
Elementary Education Department
Intermediate Education Department
Secondary Education Department

School Libraries Dept
Cultural Relations Department
Scholarships Dept
Teaching Aids Dept
Curriculum & School Books Department
Planning Department

7. ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

A number of industrial concerns and government departments have English language training programmes, for example:

Kuwait Oil Company has its own training centre:
ELT Banbury run the ELT programme with UK-recruited staff.

The Ministry of Defence has a contract with ILC to run language courses, using a rigidly-programmed American course. There are about twenty English teachers on this project.

Kuwait Airways Corporation has its own team of three British Council-recruited materials writers/teachers.

Some companies, receive English tuition for their employees from the British Council's Centre of English Studies, either in the form of specially designed courses, or as part of the centre's general English programme. Other companies use the Institute of Private Education's (see below) company ELT programme.

There are several local private language schools. The largest are the Kuwait and Salmiyah Education centres run by the Institute of Private Education. These centres provide general English language courses for the public as well as special courses for companies. The other language schools are small and serve a local market.

There are several English-medium schools in Kuwait, catering for expatriates from both the English-speaking and non-English-speaking worlds. The largest is the New English School, which has 2,000 pupils and follows a British curriculum leading to GCE O- and A-levels.

8. BRITISH SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

Council-recruited teaching staff

There are eleven Council-recruited language instructors at the Kuwait University Language Centre (see Section 2). Three English teaching staff have been recruited for the Kuwait Airways Corporation (see Section 7).

The British Council Centre of English Studies

The British Council Centre for English Studies occupies the same building as the Council offices and library, a converted villa in Mansouriah, an inner suburb of Kuwait City. The English for mixed groups programme consists of a termly average of 600 students at levels from beginner to Cambridge First Certificate. The English for special groups programme caters for the corporate client wanting a special designed course for employees. These courses are taught at the Centre or at the workplace.

There are eleven classrooms, all fully equipped, and all students are given free membership of the library, which houses a collection of simplified readers and is installing equipment for Computer Aided Language Learning. A new course will be introduced in October 1986, integrating video material with a new series of course books.

Language and literature conferences

In May 1985 the first National Language Symposium was held at the Sheraton Hotel. The main topics concerned the teaching of English and Arabic. The symposium is expected to be held every two years.

British teaching materials

The Crescent Course (OUP ELTA) used in Kuwaiti schools and most of the other English teaching books available are British in origin. There are no locally published English teaching materials.

9. AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

No official support. There are about seventy instructors at Kuwait University Language Centre recruited directly from the US.

10. OTHER AGENCY SUPPORT

None.

11. COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

With its population of only 1.5 million, Kuwait will never be a large market for paid educational services. Nevertheless there is a steady market for ELT books, software and language tuition among the sectors of the population seeking advancement through education, particularly among non-Kuwaiti Arabs and people from the Indian subcontinent.

With Kuwait's great wealth and drive to diversify away from oil there is currently heavy investment in industry, especially petrochemicals, and in port development. With so much capital invested in plant, there might be a related investment in manpower development and training. This in turn should generate a big demand for English language training, especially occupation-related ESP. Undoubtedly there is a large potential market in this field, but as yet it has remained largely untapped. The main obstacle appears to be the reluctance of senior management in industrial concerns and the government to see the importance and relevance of ELT to their training requirements. There is work to be done, explaining why English language training is necessary, before the market will open up.

There is probably room to expand the market for language courses in the UK, especially summer schools, since many Kuwaitis anyway spend the hottest months of the summer in Britain or Europe. Again, however, it is a question of persuading them that they need English language tuition.

There could be an extensive market for audio-visual aids, supplementary readers, computer-assisted language learning software, but there must be a corresponding training programme for teachers, to support any new methods or materials introduced.

The opportunities for UK or foreign language schools establishing branches in Kuwait are not as attractive as might be imagined, since all foreign schools must have a Kuwaiti sponsor who has majority ownership. The activities of any school would be subject to government regulations on fee levels, premises, class size, segregation, accounting and academic standards, and it would be liable to inspection by the Private Education Department at any time.

12. CREATIVE WRITING

None.

13. CURRENT RESEARCH

Most of the educational research in Kuwait is undertaken by the Curriculum Research Centre. The English Department there has currently only two members of staff, and is concerned mainly with assessing the effectiveness of the Crescent Course materials in teaching communicative skills to the pupils. In 1982-3 this research centred on the intermediate schools, and in 1983-4 on the secondary schools.

14. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES OF FURTHER EDUCATION

Periodicals published in Kuwait:

Instructional Technology, published twice a year by the Arab States Educational Technology Centre, PO Box 24017, Safat, Kuwait under the auspices of the Arab League Educational Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALECSO), carries articles about the use of new technology in ELT.

Al Manakh, Language Centre Journal, PO Box 5486, University of Kuwait, published twice a year (publication temporarily suspended) carries articles about ESP in Kuwait, and covers developments at the Language Centre.

Periodicals published outside Kuwait:

Middle East Education, published six times a year by International Trade Publications Ltd, Queensway House, 2 Queensway, Redhill, Surrey.

Individual articles:

Hajjaj, Ali — Abstract of Changing Trends in ELT in Kuwait. IATEFL Newsletter, No. 51, January 1978.

Hajjaj, Ali — Recent Trends in Educational Media for ELT in Kuwait. Programmed Learning and Educational Technology, Vol. 15, No. 1, February 1978.

Kharma, Nayef — The Teaching of English in Kuwait. English Language Teaching Journal, Vol. 21, No. 3, 1967

Kharma, Nayef — Children and the Language Lab - an Experiment in Kuwait. English Language Teaching Journal, Vol. 26, No. 2. February 1972, includes a brief review of ELT in Kuwait in 1972.

Kharma, Nayef — Motivation and the Young Foreign-Language Learner. English Language Teaching Journal, Vol. 31, No. 2, 1977.

15. GENERAL STATEMENT

There is a growing need for English language teaching in Kuwait, since the language is of such importance in business, education, science and technology, and serves as a lingua franca among the cosmopolitan inhabitants of the country. The great wealth of Kuwait means that adequate resources can be made available for developments, such as the introduction of the Crescent Course, the setting up of the Language Centre at the University and comprehensive training programmes in industry. There is already a well-established infra-structure to promote the development of ELT, notably the Inspectorate, the Curriculum Research Centre and the new Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. A good knowledge of English is generally considered an essential skill for advancement in most professions and occupations.

Against this must be weighed an understandable reaction that Arabic should not be usurped as the national language, a feeling which has recently received new impetus from the resurgence of fundamentalist Islam and the government's overall policy of Kuwaiti-ization. Possibly because of this, there is a lack of clarity in formulating needs and objectives in language training outside the education system while, both in schools and elsewhere, the attitude still prevails that learning a language is an academic exercise rather than training in a skill. Paradoxically, there are also financial constraints on funding specially designed ELT programmes, as authorities (with a few exceptions; such as KAC) do not discriminate between such programmes and cheaper language training, usually of an inferior kind.

On balance it could be said that ELT in Kuwait is growing in both quality and quantity, but has a long way to go before reaching the limits of improvement which could be achieved given the potential resources available.